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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Montgomery County Achieves Protection of Almost Half its Land as Open Space

Montgomery County Councilmember Nancy Fbreen and The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission's Montgomery County Planning Board Chairman Derick P. Berlage today announced that the County has achieved protection of 47 percent, or 148,000 acres, of the County's 318,000 total acres of land as "Forever Green" open space. Forever Green land includes National, State and M-NCPPC parkland, agriculturally-zoned land, homeowner association common open space and other conservation land. Compiled accurately and in great detail for the first time, the parcel-by-parcel data has been mapped and verified using M-NCPPC's sophisticated digital Geographic Information System to create a visual display of that data.

In Montgomery County, parkland totals 47,300 acres: 32,200 acres of M-NCPPC parkland, 12,000 acres of State parkland and 3,100 acres of National parkland. Of M-NCPPC's 32,200 acres of parkland, 78 percent was purchased, 15 percent was dedicated and the remaining land was donated or acquired in some other way. In recent years, parkland increases have come largely through the Legacy Open Space program acquisitions. M-NCPPC parks are mostly green space: Stream Valley and Conservation Parks comprise 51% of all parkland. In addition, Regional Parks comprise 20 percent of total parkland, of which 67 percent is maintained as natural areas. In the past 10 years, M-NCPPC has reforested more than 105 acres of parkland.

Agricultural Preservation policies and zoning in Montgomery County have led to the preservation of 91,000 acres of open space, excluding parkland. According to the national publication, Farmland Preservation Report, Montgomery County ranked first in the nation in preserving agricultural land.

Components of the agricultural preserve include:

- 2,831 acres in the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Fund
- 2,086 acres in the Maryland Environmental Trust
- 6,678 acres in Montgomery County's Agricultural Easement Program
- 43,145 acres in Transferable Development Rights (TDR) sold

Montgomery County has many residential developments with clustered housing and common open space owned and maintained by Homeowners Associations. This common open space includes more than 6,800 acres, many of which are wooded and protected by conservation easements.

The County Forest Conservation Law applies to most subdivisions built since 1993. Through 2002, more than 5,600 acres of forest have been preserved and more than 1,400 acres of trees have been planted on private property. In addition, the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission owns and preserves 3,100 wooded acres in Montgomery County to protect our water supply reservoir.

"From my travels around the County over these past several years, I could see that we had a great deal of parkland and green space. But there was no comprehensive listing of all our open space," said Councilmember Nancy Floreen. "That's why I asked the Park and Planning Commission to prepare a complete, parcel-by-parcel map of green space in the County. These new figures show almost half the County preserved as 'Forever Green.' Preservation of open and green space contributes enormously to our quality of life. It didn't happen by accident; creative programs preserved most of it. We must stay vigilant and keep adding to this treasure."

“We’re proud of the amount of farmland, parkland and open space we’ve preserved in Montgomery County through a wide variety of policies and programs,” said Berlage. “Our TDR and our Legacy Open Space programs are models for the nation. However, we have many challenges ahead – rising cost of land, protecting the agricultural reserve, tight budgets and others.” Protection of open space, stream restoration and reforestation in Montgomery County are crucial to improving environmental quality of the air and water, to maintaining scenic agricultural vistas and to assuring a viable farm industry.

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission encourages the participation of all individuals in its programs and facilities. For assistance with special needs, such as large print materials, sign language interpretation, listening devices, etc., please contact Marion Joyce, 301-495-4600, TTY 301-495-1331 or the Maryland Relay Service, 1-800-735-2258.

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